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Good Friday Addresses On The Seven Last Words From the Cross

By the Rev.
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PREFATORY NOTE

THESE ADDRESSES are printed with scarcely any corrections of the stenographic report. They are simple words. Life seemed simple at the Cross that day. We have tried to keep it simple since.

F. L. V.

To

E. C. V.

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O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

WE ARE assembled, as a company of Christians, to contemplate the mystery of the passion and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are to meditate upon the seven last words spoken by Him from the Cross.

The Cross stands out in sharp outline over against modern paganism. The Crucifixion is the Divine answer to a recrudescent paganism which is saturated with an element of degeneracy that did not exist in the old paganism. The modern pagan knows what he is about. He has heard the truth and he has rejected it. He has had at least an intellectual contact with the Divine Teacher. He has had his spiritual opportunity for meeting the Divine Teacher, and he has repudiated Him

in terms that leave no doubt as to their import.

The modern pagan cries of Christ: "Away with Him. Crucify Him." And for Christian morality, modern paganism has an insolent and poisonous contempt. The old days of a harmless, conventional Christianity are over. The choice today lies between Christianity and paganism. Never have Christians in any age been confronted with that choice more pointedly and pressingly than today.

We stand at the parting of the way at twelve o'clock on this Good Friday. One road leads to a pagan world, prosperous, brilliant, attractive. There it is. He who will is free to travel upon it. The other leads to Calvary, along the way of sorrows, up the hill, straight to the Cross. The way of sorrows, it is our business to say, is the way of peace, the way of wonder, the way of glory.

But I have been very compellingly

moved this year to feel that I owe you something more than to ask you to come to listen to seven sermons on the words of our Lord. I have a new way to suggest to you this year. I do believe that it is a better way. I do believe it will prove a more profitable way.

I want you this year to be more than passive auditors. I want you to take your part in the meditations. I want you to be occupied with your own God-guided thought. I want the Three Hours to be three hours which you and I spend together as a company of Christians who have formed the habit of meeting together once a year as a family of God.

You and I would never be satisfied with merely contemplating the suffering and death of our Lord. However pious our meditations might be, I am quite sure that you and I are never really satisfied with that. Someone has written, "To learn

to die, one must not merely meditate about dying. One must die." A great saint has written, "I shall die twice. Once to learn how and the second time how to succeed well." It was a great theologian who said that he would have as his epitaph, "Buried once, but died twice."

And you and I will never be satisfied until we have learned to die twice. We will never be satisfied until we have really made these sayings of Christ's passion our own. And it is possible to do this. I do not mean by mere contemplation. I do not mean by passionate meditation. I mean actually, in an undramatic, unspectacular, simple, every-day way. It is possible for you and me really to suffer and really to die, until we are satisfied that, so far as we have been given the chance, by the Providence of God, we have shared that Passion. I want you to go out from this church, and I want to go out myself, feeling that this thing has happened, that we

really are companions of the Passion together, and not merely people who have meditated upon it and then left it all behind.

Now the way is this. There is nothing original about it. The New Testament is steeped with it. Christian devotional and ascetic theology is steeped with it. The way is this. Here is where you must begin, and, if you please, follow me very carefully until you are sure you have got the idea. Then follow it out. Now listen.

Our Lord had five wounds: in His hands, in His feet, and in His side. Those wounds were caused by the nails and the spear which pierced His flesh. Now the next point. You and I must search for the nails of our own crucifixion. This is the way to do it. Think over what have been the four greatest sorrows of your life, four. I am going to give you time to think.

THE FIRST WORD:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

THOSE four greatest sorrows. They were not hard to remember, were they? Now we know what to do with them.

We have never quite understood them. We have never been quite reconciled to them. We have never been quite able to suppress the sigh, "Did it really have to happen?" God knows. But they have happened. They are too sacred; they are too tender; they are too piercing to dramatize. You have yours. You know what they are. I have mine, and I know what they are. And it is a nail here and it is a nail there, and it is a nail in each foot, and we are crucified with Christ. We have seen the nails of our crucifixion. Never ask again why it happened. It happened because we were being crucified. That is why it happened.

Why did God want me to be crucified? After seeing what happened to His Son, do you suppose I want to know why I am crucified? I can understand why I should be crucified. The question, if there is a question, is why should He be crucified? I suffer justly. He has done nothing amiss.

On the Cross, as you and I have reminded ourselves each year, our Lord reveals His heart. He is speaking in pain and anguish, under perfect control. At such a time there do come self-revelations. Have you ever wondered—some of you have—I have often wondered how I would behave under some of the things that I have seen my people suffer. How would I behave down in the hospital? It would be my real self then. God help me. I wonder what it would be.

So our Lord in these words is revealing Himself. He is looking down at the soldier who drove the last blow on the nail-

tops. They have begun to gamble over His clothes. He looks out over a mass who hate Him poisonously, irrationally, malignantly, and He looks out over a world which has produced a mentality which has created an atmosphere universally hostile to Him. His words were a stumblingblock. They were foolishness. They were blasphemous. No place for Him anywhere. And He is God! He is dying for the world. Does not anybody understand? "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" Is not there someone out there? No. Now He is facing that.

Your imagination and mine could only very feebly depict our Lord's spiritual suffering; not merely physical pain, but the spiritual suffering of a sharp contact with an evil world which will not change, a contact of love which meets nothing but outrage. It is hard to imagine. The words float out over the crowd, the incense rising from the altar of sacrifice, so fragrant:

"Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. I know them, and I bear my witness for them. There is not one of them who knows what he is doing, and there is not one of them who, if he knew what he were doing, would not regret it."

Our Lord looks down through murky, muddy waters, and down at the bottom of it all he sees the self that might be, that can be, which only needs a little love, a little trust, a little loyalty, to draw it out. So He prays, "Forgive them; for they know not what they do," because He knows that is the way to make them know what they do. That is the self which our Lord reveals.

Now we go back to our own wounds. You are carrying four wounds. They are the four greatest sorrows of your lives. We are going to have a fifth wound that will end it, but not now. And you and I are living under the conscious or subconscious pressure of those pains. We are

doing our work; we are making our social contacts; we are saying our prayers; we are having recourse to the sacraments; we are carrying with a smiling face the pains which only those who know us best can guess. We are crucified.

And what sort of persons are we becoming under all this? Some of those sorrows are very old indeed. Some of those sorrows are more or less new. The last stroke of the nail has been so near that the hammer has hardly been laid down. How is that affecting us? What kind of people is it making of us? How are you standing the wear and tear of life? If people who have not seen you for a number of years were to meet you, would they think you have changed? You see, you and I do not have to speak to show what we are, with mere words. Our lives at moments of great pressure will force an involuntary cry, and that cry will tell the whole story.

As you and I hang on our crosses, are

we like a person whom we are to hear about soon, who was penitent, or are we growing like a person who hung on the other side of the cross, and only grew sullen and bitter? What is the greatest injury that anybody ever did to you? Now, think it over. I am going to give you a few moments before we go on. What is the hardest thing you have to forgive? Who is the person? What did they do? Think.

Now let us, with that greatest injury in our minds, kneel before our Lord as He says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and let us—you and I—offer the only devotion that is worth while, far better than mere pious prayers, let us offer our devotion and say, "Lord Jesus, if you help me, I will do my best to forgive him, to forgive her."

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send Thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift

of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before Thee. Grant this for Thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE SECOND WORD:

"Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

THIS companion of our Lord was the first fruits of His charity. It was because our Lord had moved him by a quite uncalculated influence. He had not spoken to him. The penitent thief had become a penitent because he had watched our Lord. He had never seen anyone like Him before. Of course he had not. He had seen brave criminals. He intended to be a brave one himself. And here was a person who was not a criminal. Here was a person whose whole personality radiated such a royal dignity, such a kingly kindliness, that he could not understand. The cry really was in his own heart, "Why what is He doing here? This is no place for Him." And something that is so much more fascinating because it was

not the spoken word, something went out from our Lord to that man on the cross, and finally he plucked up his courage, and said, "Lord, remember me. I don't know who you are. I have never seen anyone like you before. But it has done me good to be with you, and I am going to die with a decent thought in my mind, the kind of thought I never would have had if I hadn't seen You." Then the word comes: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

A queer sort of fellow to be taken to Paradise. What will the holy people up there think about him? Never mind what they think. The angels can tell them something about him. "Why, don't you know who he is? He is the man who was crucified with our Lord down there this morning, and our Lord has brought him home with Him. They became friends on the Cross." And there is not a seraph whose place is in the immediate presence of the

Deity who will ever forget when he meets that man that he is God's friend.

That was a great deal to happen to a man in a little less than three hours. What had really happened was this: There was a certain self buried down deep. It had never really come to the surface. It had never really been released, because no one knew it was there. He was just a common little boy. He was just a wild youth. He was just an adventurous young man, and he came to grief, and he went to the devil. A person with a history like that is not apt to meet with an over kindly reception in this world. And that is why people stay as they are. That is why you and I very often stay as we are, for the lack of someone to be the medium through which the love of Jesus on the Cross may come.

It is when you and I have enough of that love to look beneath the surface, and to see, hidden within, the real person, who is really worth while, who is really lov-

able, who is really competent, and then to keep on loving, not the person we see on the surface, but the person whom we know is down underneath and who is sure to come out sometime, if only our love for him can last, and our loyalty can stand the strain; it is then we understand this Second Word. That is the way mothers and fathers have saved children. That is the way husbands and wives could save each other nowadays, if only they would. That is the way a friend saves a friend. "Today shalt thou be with Me." "I know him, I understand him, I believe in him." Why, a person who will do that can do anything for you.

Now, there is someone in your life, someone in my life, more than one I can think of; so can you; and under God their eternal salvation will be vastly affected, if it is not determined, by your capacity and mine to love them and believe in them and to trust them, no matter

what happens. We are willing to be the last person left. Now, who is this?

When our devotion time comes, ask our Lord to accept your greatest responsibility. You have offered your greatest forgiveness, and I know you meant it. Now you are going to offer your greatest responsibility. You are going to say, "I will endure all things. I will believe all things. I will hope all things. I love them. I will be loyal to them. They shall be my nearest because they seem so far away. I will make them my dearest and my best."

While you are singing the hymn, recall these persons by name, and then remember where they are now at this particular minute. Now you will offer up yourself for them.

God is going to get wonderful offerings from you today. Now let us offer up our love and our trust and our loyalty for the persons whom we have picked out to

give our lives for. Kneel down and pray for them.

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers, and dispose the way of Thy children whom we love, and for whom we pray, towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among all the changes and chances of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by Thy most gracious and ready help; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking; We beseech Thee to have compassion upon our infirmities; and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE THIRD WORD:

"Woman, behold thy son! Son, behold thy mother."

WE ARE crucified, not just for the three hours today. We are crucified for all the hours of our lives. Some of us have been crucified for quite some time. We have offered Him our greatest act of forgiveness. We have offered Him our greatest responsibility for personal loyalty. That means we will not be free to live our own lives any more. We will not be able to do as we please any more. We have this great responsibility. We have to sanctify ourselves for their sakes.

Our Lord is looking down upon His Mother. Their relations are too tender, too sacred, for us to meditate upon them aloud. It is enough to know that the sword is piercing the heart of the blessed Mother. No one ever knew Him as she knew Him, and knows Him. No one ever loved Him as she does and did. She is the

most important person standing by the Cross. She was the most important person in Bethlehem. She was the most important person in Nazareth. She is the most important person in heaven, because she is His Mother. If that is not enough to satisfy the answer, "Why do we honor the blessed Virgin?" then my reply would be, "I do not think we have any other reason that you would understand."

Our Lord looked down at St. John. St. John is the Apostle of Love. But even he had not altogether acquitted himself with glory. But he was back. Love brought him back. He loved more than any of the rest. He did falter; he did flee; but he loved, and he was the first back. We must not forget that. And how our Lord trusts him! He said, "I am going to leave My Mother in your hands. Oh, yes; I saw you run. I know. But listen. I am trusting you. You understand. Behold thy Mother. I need not ask you to take good

care of her. I know you will." That was what St. John got. Cannot you imagine what it meant to him?

But you know it is not an easy thing to surrender your own personal care. It is not an easy thing to allow your own personal devotion to be transferred. It is not an easy thing to think that in a very little while I will be gone and they two will have each other. The bereavement of our Lord never was more piercing than at the moment of His greatest and most selfless tenderness to His Mother and His most generous and gracious trust of St. John. He lifted His bereavement up until it shines out, a splendid act of chivalry. A heaven born gentleman! Yes, these words show us much about our Lord. This is what He said in the midst of His darkest hour and His most extreme agony, and it all happened so gently, so quietly, so perfectly. It was a perfect thing perfectly done.

Now, that is something to climb up to. But perhaps you and I are farther on the way than we supposed. Listen. What is your greatest bereavement? I am not going to hurt you. You will not feel badly. But your greatest bereavement—the one person. Now, now brace yourself up. You see what you have got to do. Oh, I know you will never get over it. I know, because I never did. Now you are going to take that bereavement which you never understood. You can never be reconciled to it. God help you, I do not blame you. You are going to offer it up at the time when we are paying our devotion to the third word.

You know you and I are really praying today. You are going to offer that one central, greatest bereavement, you are going to offer it up, going to offer it up on your cross where your four greatest griefs have nailed you beside our Lord. You are going to try and do a perfect thing per-

fectly, too. You are going to offer that bereavement up to our Lord, and then you are going to ask Him to make you self-forgetting and tender and thoughtful of others, courteous and kind, yes, and cheerful. It is the only thing to do, isn't it, after what we have just listened to and seen? It is hard. Oh, well, if it were not hard, it would spoil the whole thing. It is because it is hard that it matters.

I need not ask you to spend very long in recalling the bereavement. We will offer it up in a moment, and while I have seen this church filled with prayers and with incense for years, I doubt not it will be saturated today in every stone with the best things that are in your hearts, and they will make it a fragrant place forever.

Our devotion to that word of our Lord will be the offering up again of the greatest bereavement you, I, any of us, have ever known in our lives, the offering it up

as an act of devotion to our Lord for that word, and that we may have in us the stuff of which that word is made.

O Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are delivered from their earthly prisons; We humbly commend the soul of this Thy servant, whom we love, and for whom we pray, into Thy hands as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour; beseeching Thee, that it may be precious in Thy sight. Wash it, we pray Thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, that was slain to take away the sins of the world; that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before Thee; through the merits of Jesus Christ Thine only Son our Lord.

O Almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of Thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love Thee; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE FOURTH WORD:

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

SPIRITUAL desolation is very apt to follow acts of devotion. The devotion would not be a devotion if it were not attended with something that costs us everything.

Now, our Lord is enduring the deepest, darkest anguish of His whole incarnate life. He has no one left. He is all alone. I do not mean that He shrank from solitude. He taught us all we ever knew of the right use of solitude. I do not mean to say that He cannot bear the pain of the inevitable separations which are bound to come into anyone's life. For our sake He allowed the consoling sense of the presence of God to be taken away. Now, when you and I have gotten to a point when for a little while religion is the su-

preme object of our interests, we find delight in the presence of God. When we are deprived of the sense of the presence of God, we are plunged in deepest desolation. There is no desolation like it.

You and I are only in process of spiritual development, and you and I have spent hours and days and parts of years without being keenly sensible of the presence of God; but even we know the anguish of spiritual desolation. Well, if we could know, what must it have been for our Lord? He was God the Son incarnate. He was of one substance with the Father. He allowed Himself to be God-forsaken. There are no words about it because it is beyond our power to imagine.

There is wrung from His heart the cry of spiritual agony: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And, oh, the humility! All those people down there. They hear what He says. "Ah, ah!

I told you. I told you." A few people had been running after Him because they believed He was a prophet of God. "He said He was the Son of God. When we said we would crucify Him, you said, O you monsters of iniquity. Now, who is right? You heard what He said. He said that God has forsaken Him. And so you see this is not such a terrible thing as you thought. Only another criminal gone. Forget about Him." That would be the reaction on the crowd.

In the moment of His supreme spiritual desolation, mark you, He was humble and simple and steadfast. He was God-forsaken. He could not see His Father. Worse than that: He could not feel Him. His Father had left Him, all He had; and He was simple, and He was humble, and He was steadfast. It was not to make any difference. He had set His face. He was to die for these people. And they had rejected Him. He was to offer

a sacrifice to God, and God had forsaken Him. Very well. To suffer for Him will be its own and only reward. To stretch out bleeding hands shall be the supreme privilege. "The world rejects Me and God forsakes Me. I shall stand by."

Now there, if you like, there is your spiritual hero, not for any hope of praise, not for any hope of reward; asking nothing, desiring nothing, seeking nothing; going on without moving an eyelid, unchanged, unchangeable, like a rock, in the dark.

Now, then, what is the greatest spiritual desolation that you have ever known? I wonder if by any chance someone is in this congregation who would say to me after our devotions are over, if he had the chance, "Oh, yes, I know what you are talking about. I had an experience some years ago. It killed my religion. I haven't it any more. There is nothing in Christianity. God, if He were

what you say He is, would never have forsaken me as He did." I wonder.

Well, if you are in the congregation, I am going to say this to you, but what I say to you will be for us all. Desolation, the deprivation of the conscious sense of the presence of God, happens to everybody. Have you ever, ever waited—so many of you have; I wonder if any of you have not—have you ever waited for an hour or two hours or three hours for someone you loved who was in an operating room, and you were waiting to see what the result was going to be? What did you do during that time? I am going to tell you what I did. I was absolutely petrified, numb. I could not utter one prayer; I could not think one thought; I was so perfectly helpless. And a Bishop I knew went into his chapel and prayed for one hour. But, then, of course, it was not his child. That does make a difference, doesn't it?

How do you and I behave under deso-

lation, when God seems to have forsaken us? We have prayed for days and days and days and days, and nothing ever happened. We have worked and worked and worked and worked, and nothing ever got done. We have trusted and trusted and trusted and trusted, and everything disappointed. And there are other things, too, that were bitter to bear. They made us cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? What am I to do now?"

What do you think is the greatest desolation that you have ever had to bear so far? Go down quite deeply now. It is not a thing that you usually bring out. Well, no one is going to see it but God today. You know, I not only think, but I know, it will be a wonderful sight for the angels to see you filling this whole church, and just in a few moments holding in outstretched hand the secret desolations of your souls. Think of the pairs of hands that will be stretched out. Think of the

secret desolations that will be offered up. I know what mine is. I do not think you have to wait a long time to discover yours.

We will sing our hymn and then we will make the act of offering of our greatest desolation. Nothing but the best will do for Him today.

Now we will kneel down and we will offer up to God the deepest, bitterest, secret sorrow that each one of us has. We all have them.

We beseech Thee, O Lord, pour Thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of Thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an Angel, so by His Cross and Passion we may be brought unto the glory of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

O merciful God, and heavenly Father, who hast taught us in Thy holy Word

that Thou dost not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men; Look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon the sorrows of Thy servants. In Thy wisdom Thou hast seen fit to visit them with trouble, and to bring distress upon them. Remember them, O Lord, in mercy; sanctify Thy fatherly correction to them; endue their souls with patience under their affliction, and with resignation to Thy blessed will; comfort them with a sense of Thy goodness; lift up Thy countenance upon them, and give them peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God, who on the mount didst reveal to chosen witnesses Thine only-begotten Son wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistering; Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in His beauty, who with Thee, O Father, and

Thee, O Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE FIFTH WORD:

"I thirst."

THIRST." Our Lord is surrounded now with a forest of crosses, and you and I are part of it. You are there on your cross. I am there on mine. Our Lord speaks now of physical thirst. It is the first mention: "I thirst."

Why, that hand had touched lepers and He had said, "Be thou clean." It had touched the eyes of the blind, and had given sight. It had touched the ears of the deaf, and given hearing. It had made the lame walk. That voice had called a dead man to life. There was nothing He could not do. Now He says He is thirsty. Always such surprising things, such simple things, such intimate things.

Such humble words: "I thirst." "Yes, I thirst. Did you suppose I could not thirst? Did you suppose I could not suf-

fer? That is why I cared when people were blind and deaf and lame and leprous and possessed of devils. That is why I cared when people's hearts were breaking. It is because I knew what suffering means. That is why people used to come to Me before I came up here. They knew, and they always knew, that I understood. Yes, I am very, very thirsty. I have only about an hour to live. It is almost over. I have lived for them. I shall die for them. I have done my best for them. I do not mind saying I am very tired and I am very thirsty."

But, ah, the thing that really hurt Him was the thirst of the deprivation of the one thing He desired. If only He might save the world, if only the world would understand what it was all about, if only the world would see what it was losing!

Well, you know our Lord loved the people, all of them. He loved Judas Iscariot. He would have taken him back

in an instant if Judas had come to the Cross and said, "I am heartbroken at what I have done." He would have taken Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas; he would have taken them all; and in the joy of that I think He would have forgotten to speak about His thirst and pain. The deprivation of everything that He had lived for, worked for, prayed for, desired; and He was now dying. To do all that without one trace of result, in a world that is mad for results. You and I can understand.

What had He to show? He had come down attended by angels singing *Gloria in Excelsis*. He lived that life. What more did they want? What more could anyone do? When has ever anyone been able to find a fault from that day to this? He hangs on the Cross, and He looks out over the world, and He has got His Mother; He has got a great woman penitent; He has got a beloved disciple; He has a few sorrowing women, and from the

disciples a few who were coming back when they got their courage up. And what else has He got?

As He looks out over this city today, how much has He got? What will He find in the offices, in the country clubs, and all the outdoor life, and the life of the movies, the life in the theaters, and the life in town clubs and town houses? You thought I was going to say He would find nothing, but I am not. He will find people in all those places who love Him, and love Him very deeply, who love Him very tenderly; but He will find a great many people in this city who do not, and who do not care.

And when He cries, "I thirst," it is the thirst of a crushing disappointment. There is nothing that will take the life out of you like that; nothing that will smite you so deeply as a crushing disappointment. There is no use going away for a rest; no use going away to get your-

self picked up. There is only one thing that can rest you, there is only one thing that can pick you up, and that is getting the thing you have set your heart on.

And supposing you cannot have it? Then you have got to learn from Him what to do. You have got to be simple. You have got to be humble. You have got to be brave and frank. You have got to say, "Yes, it was a terrific disappointment. It just about finished me, but not quite. I have got to stand it. I thirst. I have not got the thing I worked for. I have not got the thing I prayed for. I have not got the thing I wanted. All life is pretty empty, pretty painful. There is only one thing to do. I am up here. I would not be anywhere else. I thirst. I will wait; and time, patience, will do the rest."

Now, you and I cannot possibly be content with a mere meditation upon a theme like this. I doubt if any one of us could make it sufficiently graphic. But even if

we could, what good would it do? None of us wants to go away from this church at the end of the Three Hours with only the memory of an intensely dramatic setting for a piercing tragedy. No, we have got to get the stuff of which this word is made, "I thirst."

What is the great disappointment of your life? The chances are nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand that nothing would drag that from your lips. It is probably a thing that you never told any one, the great disappointment of your life, the great deprivation, the thing that has left your soul thirsty. What is it? Think.

It has taken so much out of your life that it has left it empty. Perhaps that will help you to trace it. You want it back. You want it back. You cannot have it. You never can have it. Now, can you think?

It does not take very long. It is nearer than we thought. Now, after we have sung the hymn, then we will make the devotion and we will offer up to our Lord the greatest deprivation, the greatest disappointment that we have, and we will carry it for the rest of our days without wincing and without affectation.

Let us kneel and offer up in honor of this word the secret deprivation which is one of the hardest things each one of us has to bear, and then, having offered it silently, let us say our Lord's Prayer to seal the offering.

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For Thine is the

kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE SIXTH WORD:

"It is finished."

THE offerings which we have made to God today are not new offerings. They have been stored up in the bottom of our hearts for a long, long time. But what you and I have done has been to offer them up, and we mean to keep them offered up, because you and I know that that is the way to get the stuff out of which the Seven Words were made, and you and I are trying to live ourselves, not poetically but actually, into the Passion. We are nailed to the Cross by the four greatest sorrows we have ever known. We are offering up the substance of the words from the Cross in our own offerings of the greatest things we have to offer, the greatest act of forgiveness, the greatest responsibility, the greatest bereavement, the

greatest desolation, the greatest deprivation. Why, it does make you feel better when you know you are giving the best you have, doesn't it? It makes you feel as though you really belonged here. At all events you have done what you could.

Now, our Lord is really arriving at the end. He knows even in the depth of this physical anguish and this spiritual desolation, He knows His work is finished. From Bethlehem to Calvary there has not been one weak link in the chain. There is not one spot that will not stand the test. There has not been one word left unspoken. There has not been one work left undone. It is a flawless piece of work. It will stand the test of time. It will stand the test of eternity. God the Father will look upon it and see that it is good. The world will never be able to point its finger at Him and taunt Him with neglect. It is all done. It is finished.

It means that you and I have a full,

free, and sufficient chance. There are no obstacles without. There are no hindrances within. We have a fair chance. The work of redemption is complete. You and I may confess our sins and receive absolution, and the angels will look upon that work of redemption and say, "It is finished; he, she, is forgiven." There is no more to do. You and I may receive the grace of the sacraments. We may be filled with heavenly grace and benediction, fortified by the virtue of the Body and Blood of our most blessed Lord. We may go out to face a world of peril and pain. But the angels who see what has been done by the touch of the Blessed Sacrament will say, "It is finished. There is nothing more they need. His grace is sufficient for them."

Yes, the whole work of redemption is complete. No one need be lost. It will be our own choice if we are. No person who did not know will be trapped. No person who did not understand will be damned.

Whatever the pain, whatever the weakness, whatever the need, the work of redemption is finished. It is a perfect thing. It is our Lord's work. Now, no matter how bad the world may seem and be, no matter how bad we seem and are, remember the work of redemption is finished, and there never can be one doubt or shadow of an uncertainty about our getting to heaven, if we really want to go. All we have got to do is to go. The road is finished. Think what it cost.

Now, then, all He asked of you, all He asked of me, was to do one thing for Him, because most of us have only one thing we want to do. It is the thing we were born for. It is the thing that He expects. It is the one thing that is indicated by this word. It makes you feel, "That is my supreme duty. That is the thing I have got to do. I have got to do it at any cost, any sacrifice, before I die. That is the thing I have got to do." You and I have got to

be able to say, "I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do." That is the only way we can thank Him.

What do you think is the one thing that really matters that you have to do, the one thing that if you did not do you would say, "I have not been faithful; I could have done that; I knew that was the thing I was meant to do; I did not do it." What is the one thing?

To get the substance of that word, "It is finished," in us, we will take the one thing that is most important in our lives, that one thing we have got to do, and we will just hold it out. We will say, "Here it is, my Lord. I will do my best."

Now we will offer to God our promise to do the great thing that we know He wants us to do.

Direct us, O Lord in all our doings, with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help; that

in all our works begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy Name, and finally, by Thy mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Saviour of the world, who by Thy Cross and Precious Blood hast redeemed us; Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord.

THE SEVENTH WORD:

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

UR LORD speaks the last word: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." His first words began with Father, and His last began with Father. That relationship never has been lost. Even in His desolation He was suffering as His Father's Son. And now, without any hesitation, He commends His spirit into His Father's hands. He offers His death. He is not hanging drooping, not just passively enduring. He is offering actively His death, the sacrifice, for the sins of the world. He is giving back now to His Father the finished work which was given Him to do. He came forth from the Father. He returns. He is coming into His own. It is all finished. That journey down from heaven to Bethlehem has gone

around its circle, and it is coming home by way of Calvary. The gates of heaven are open; the company is waiting. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And when the end of this period of devotion comes—it may come in the middle of the hymn, it may come in the middle of a line, but when it comes we will stop, for it will mean that He has gone. He has gone to His Father.

Now we come to the fifth wound. We have offered up our four wounds, the four greatest sorrows we ever had. There are the nails that crucify us. It is going to be a really bracing thing to think about, isn't it—that when we all come out of here this afternoon and go in all directions, that we all know we are crucified with Christ; we are real companions of the Crucifixion? We have not only been praying this afternoon. We have been doing the real thing. The fifth wound, that will be the last sickness and the death.

Last night when I came out of the chapel where the Altar of Repose was, and sharper still as I went down with the sub-deacon and with the celebrant carrying the Blessed Sacrament into the chapel to the Altar of Repose, it all seemed so terrible. We seemed to be, and really we were, carrying Him down into the Garden of Gethsemane, to leave Him there to be killed, and as we turned back I know I felt a pang of anguish. And last night I thought, "Yes, but you know some day He has got to watch you. You have got to be in your last agony, and you are going to die, too. You are going to have your Good Friday. It is far better to brace yourself up to get ready to do it well than it is to allow yourself to indulge in, what is, after all, a devotion that will do no good unless you bring it to something that is really practical."

The thing that you and I have got to do is just to say, "Yes, we have been

watching Him today. Well, He is going to watch us some day." And you and I will in our last devotion take our last sickness by anticipation, we will take our last pain by anticipation, we will take our death by anticipation, and we will hold it up and we will say, "Whenever this comes, wherever this comes, however this comes, I will offer it up in union with your death on the Cross, and with you I shall say, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. I will make my last confession; I will receive my last communion; I will be anointed; and I will offer it up a willing sacrifice." And then we shall have gone the whole way with Him, crucified with Christ.

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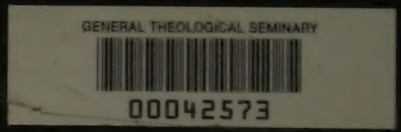
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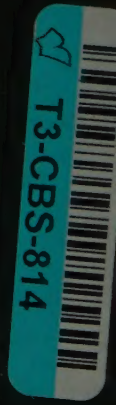
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